Premieres Personalities Portraits

new music concerts

94 95 season

Robert Aitken
artistic director

Artistic Director's Message

When the brochure is finally printed and stands there before our very eyes, I am often surprised at the shape the series has taken. There are always the same basic principles which we attempt to maintain and this is to show a cross section of representative styles which are current throughout the world and contrast these with the latest musical developments in Canada. Of course this mandate can take many forms and often gives each series a very individual shape.

This year our season happens to focus on anniversaries and portraits with each concert centred around a personality rather than a theme. In order to truly grasp the essence of the music we always invite the composers to help with the rehearsals, if not conduct the pieces themselves. In a few instances, such as this evening's concert, the composers cannot or do not want to travel. In Ustvolskaya's case, in order to present a Portrait, we asked her to please give us the name of someone who influenced her and to suggest a younger composer who may have been influenced by her or whom she felt needed more exposure. Ustvolskaya's response was that there is no composer that has ever influenced her, and there is no composer whom she has ever influenced. Our solution to round out this concert and provide some clues to her musical personality is the first public showing of a film about her and a performance of the seldom heard Shostakovitch 12th String Quartet. In a similar fashion our seasons gradually come together.

We appreciate your support and trust that you enjoy listening to these programs as much as we do producing them. Of course each concert cannot be everything to everyone, but we hope that our series gives you a number of works that you enjoy, that the concerts are thought provoking and most of all that you are excited by the limitless creative imagination of contemporary music.

Welcome to NMC's 1994-95 Series!

Robert Aitken
Artistic Director

Sunday, October 23, 1994
7:00 pm documentary film
8:15 pm concert
du Maurier Theatre Centre,
Harbourfront Centre

Galina Ustvolskaya

Programme

Galina Ustvolskaya: Première Screening
A film made by director Cherry Duyns and composer/performer Reinbert De Leeuw
Narrated by Judith Orban

Galina Ustvolskaya
Composition No. 1:
"Dona nobis pacem" (1970/71) dur. 15'
Robert Aitken, piccolo
Mark Tetrault, tuba
Marc Widner, piano

Galina Ustvolskaya
Trio (1949) dur. 21'
1. Espressivo 2. Dolce 3. Energico
Stanley McCartney, clarinet
Fujiko Imajishi, violin
Marc Widner, piano

Programme

Intermission

Dmitry Shostakovitch
String Quartet No. 12 (1968) dur. 28'
1. Moderato 2. Allegretto

Quatuor Morency
Denise Lupien, violin
Olga Ranzenhofer, violin
Francine Lupien-Bang, viola
Christopher Best, cello

Galina Ustvolskaya
Symphony No. 5 "Amen" (1989/90) dur. 10'
Barbara Bolte, oboe
Michael White, trumpet
Mark Tetreault, tuba
Fujiko Imajishi, violin
Trevor Tureski, percussion
Yuri Tsitsivadze, narrator

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The Association of Canadian Women Composers
L'association des femmes compositeurs canadiennes.

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Galina Ustvolskaya

I work differently than other composers. I compose only when I am in a state of Grace. Then the work rests for a while and when its time has come I set it free. If its time does not come I destroy it. ***Galina Ustvolskaya, 1990.***

Galina Ivanovna Ustvolskaya, born June 19, 1919, to this day remains secluded in the city of her birth: the old Imperial Capital of Russia, variously known in this century as St. Petersburg, Petrograd, Leningrad, and again, St. Petersburg.

Ustvolskaya received a rigourous musical apprenticeship (1937-1939) at the Leningrad Arts School, a college closely associated with the Leningrad Conservatory. In 1940 she graduated to the Rimsky-Korsakov Conservatory. Her principal instructors at these institutions were Dmitri Shostakovich (1906-1975) and Maximilian Steinberg.

Described by Shostakovich as "a dry and didactic person", Steinberg (1883-1946) was Rimsky-

Korsakov's son-in-law. A notorious yet highly efficient taskmaster, he reigned over the Conservatory for four decades, becoming dean and then rector of the institution. As a composer he was noted for the populist incorporation of folk music into his works.

Shostakovitch began teaching the 18-year old aspiring composer in the year which saw the triumphant première of his *Symphony No. 5*, the profoundly ambiguous nature of which seemed intent on signalling something more than "*the creative reply of a Soviet artist to justified criticism*". Heralding the fourth decade of his life, it was the composition that marked the maturity of his artistic vision.

The relationship between teacher and pupil transcended the usual pedagogical arrangements. Long after their studies together ended Shostakovich regularly sent works in progress to his pupil for her opinion and presented her with the manuscripts of several of his scores. Nevertheless Ustvolskaya remained, in the picturesque words of the Soviet critic Viktor Suslin, "*the only one of Shostakovich's pupils able to attain the cosmic velocity needed to escape the gravitational field of a 'massive planet' such as Shostakovich.*" Indeed, her teacher once wrote to her, "*It is not you who are influenced by me; rather, it is I who am influenced by you.*"

Their studies together were shattered in June of 1941 by the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union. Like Shostakovich, who served in the volunteer fire brigade, Ustvolskaya served in a military hospital during the crisis and was unable to complete her undergraduate studies with him until 1945-47.

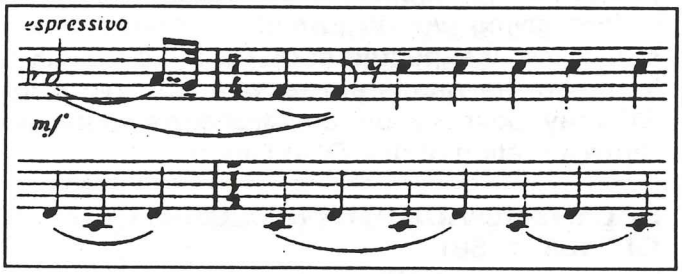
As a result of decisions reached at the 1948 Communist Party Congress, Shostakovich was dismissed from the Conservatory shortly after Ustvolskaya began her graduate studies with him. Consequently she became a student of yet another of Rimsky's relatives, this time a nephew, Georgy Rimsky-Korsakov (1901-1965), an expert in the field of acoustics and an early proponent of quarter-tone music. Judging from the musical evidence, his spiritual influence must have been a considerable one, for the role of acoustics is central to the distinctiveness of her style.

She began teaching at the Conservatory (not without considerable opposition) prior to her graduation in 1950 and maintained a precarious position there until her retirement in 1977. These were decades of intense yet often reclusive musical effort that saw on the one hand the composition of a certain number of propagandistic film scores and patriotic choral works of the "socialist realism" school (with titles like "Dawn Over The Fatherland" and "The Hero's Exploits") and on the other a small yet significant body of visionary creations that would remain unheard and unpublished for twenty years.

Today, Ustvolskaya's catalogue for the definitive edition of her compositions by Sikorski of Hamburg consists of 21 items. She dismisses her numerous large-scale Soviet enterprises as "*works that I had to write to support my family, which had it very bad in those days.*"

Though Ustvolskaya's more progressive music was as often ignored as it was self-supressed, Shostakovich, painfully aware that expulsion from the Union of Soviet Composers would lead to the

termination of her professional career, felt compelled on several occasions to speak out on her behalf, most notably when Ustvolskaya found herself an object of ridicule and was attacked by Party officials for her "*obstinacy and narrow-mindedness*". His defense of her continued to the end of his life. In a letter written in 1970 to the composer Boris Tishchenko he re-iterated his conviction that "*the music of G.I. Ustvolskaya will achieve worldwide renown, to be valued by all who perceive truth in music to be of paramount importance.*"



TRIO FOR CLARINET, VIOLIN AND PIANO (1949)

While Ustvolskaya's *Trio* may sound fairly conventional to contemporary ears, in the climate of Soviet aesthetics at that time the searching, atonal theme with which it begins and the emphasis on linear counterpoint that sustains the work leaves it open to charges of *Formalism*, which may account for the fact that the work was not heard in public for twenty years. Certainly Ustvolskaya was haunted by the Communist party resolution of 1948 which condemned Shostakovich and other prominent composers for "*formalistic distortions and anti-democratic tendencies alien to the Soviet People*".

Of the three movements it is the finale which is the most remarkable. In the course of the powerful fugue which opens the movement a secondary theme characterised by a five-note upbeat emerges from the clarinet. This is the melody which Shostakovich quotes in his *String Quartet No. 5.* (This work, dated 1952, may well have been written much earlier, in as much as Shostakovich himself supressed a number of his major works from 1948 to the death of Stalin.) A long soliloquy for the clarinet provides a bridge to a gentler presentation of these two themes, before giving way in turn to an extraordinarily static and unexpected coda for the piano alone in which the prominent emphasis on the note 'D' may possibly be construed as a musical representation of the 'D' in Dmitri.

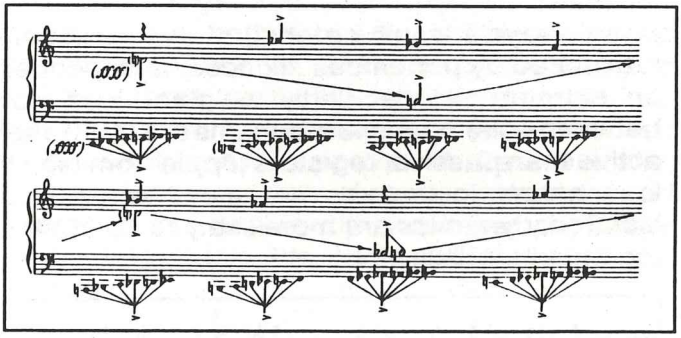
SHOSTAKOVICH: STRING QUARTET NO. 12, OP. 133 (1968)

The *Twelfth Quartet* marks the onset of the final period of Shostakovich's creativity. In poor health, arthritic and weakened by his failing heart, he began to develop a much more advanced musical idiom.

In his political role as the undisputed "Great Soviet Composer" Shostakovich had often been required to publically denounce Schoenberg's serial method of composition. However, in the turbulence of the late Sixties no less a rival than Stravinsky was consistently expressing himself in that idiom, while others closer to home like Lutoslawski and Penderecki had transformed serialism in an astonishing fashion.

In this Quartet, as well as in the *Violin Sonata* that preceded it, his simple yet elegant concession to

the times was to place dodecaphonic themes in symbolic juxtaposition with diatonic ones. Though nominally in two movements, there are a number of sub-sections to the work that are intended to be understood programmatically. According to the composer the first movement (exposition) represents "*the world of high ideals*" which finds itself challenged in the second movement by "*destructive forces*" (scherzo), featuring an insistent theme from the 'cello. The funeral march that follows this conflict (adagio) is descriptive of "*a mood of despair*". An ensuing development section (moderato) expresses "*purity of intention and high aspiration*", while the final section (coda) proclaims an ironically hollow *"reaffirmation of good over evil"*.

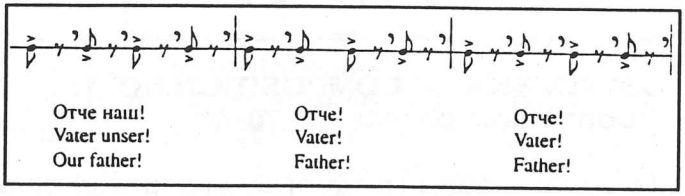


USTVOLSKAYA: COMPOSITION NO. 1: "Dona nobis pacem" (1970-71)

This is the first in a Trilogy of devotional works that occupied the composer for five years. It was followed by a **Dies irae** (1972-73) and a **Benedictus qui venit** (1974-75). The rhythms formed by the free repetition of the words "dona nobis pacem" —grant us peace— recur like an inner prayer throughout the often disturbing events of this three-movement composition.

Ustvolskaya's radical keyboard stylings, the evolution of which may be traced in her series of six piano sonatas (1947-1988), are amply demonstrated here by her many variations on the invention known as the *tone-cluster.* While not a new keyboard technique, having been pioneered by the American composer Henry Cowell in the 1920's and subsequently appropriated by Bartók as a rhythmic device, Ustvolskaya's use of these tightly packed agglomerations of up to twelve notes is exacting and highly refined. Typically attacked with brutal force, they appear in all manner of arthritic contortions, hammering fists and even the occasional 'karate chop'. The metaphysical fragility of the complex overtones that result from such acts of calculated violence are only fully apparent in live performance.

Ustvolskaya's Iconic ordering of events in time, articulated by portentous silences, is dependent on extreme yet decidedly weighted contrasts between polar opposites: rhythms are more often active than passive, registers topple from high to low, harmonic textures are more dense than isolated, dynamics are more likely to be deafening than inaudible.



USTVOLSKAYA: SYMPHONY NO. 5, "Amen" (1989-90)

The instrumentation of this narrative setting of *The Lord's Prayer* is reminiscent of a typical

Tibetan orchestra of Alphorns (the tuba) and shawms (trumpet and oboe in near-unison), to which the violin adds the occasional plaintive refrain. The sense of ritual characteristic of the music is heightened by recurring hammer-blows upon a singular percussion instrument, a hollow wooden cube of precise dimensions. Throughout the world the striking of wooden boxes is associated with rites of exorcism, and Christian mystics have long noted that the unfolding of the sides of any cube will yield the form of a Gnostic cross.

The microscopic examination of sound-events typical of the science of acoustics is expressed in Ustvolskaya's musical language through a tonal, incantory prosody cast in a handful of notes in a restricted range and even rhythm, giving the impression of both an oddly archaic plainsong and a sequence of discreet, change-ringing events. Occasionally the tones of this musical carillon are isolated, frozen in time so that their inner beauty may be perceived. Paradoxically, the tremendous powers of concentration needed to project this apparently simple yet physically exhausting music lifts it into the realms of the spiritual.

With the sole exception of the *First Symphony* (1955), which still has some connection with traditional symphonic concepts of a work for large orchestra, the completion of an astounding cycle of five Symphonies was Ustvolskaya's crowning achievement of the 1980's. All have titles or texts from Biblical sources, are scored for unconventional forces, and are single-movement works. *Symphony No. 5* represents the closing of the circle and appears to be her final composition.

It sometimes happens that artists may define their aesthetic language to such exacting standards that they become prisoners of their own vocabulary and cease to function creatively. Copland, Sibelius and Ives were known to have reached such an impasse late in their lives. For the seventy-five year old Ustvolskaya however the proposition is a far simpler one: "*When God grants me the Grace to compose again I will gladly follow His Will without question.*"

Programmes notes ©1994 by Daniel Charles Foley

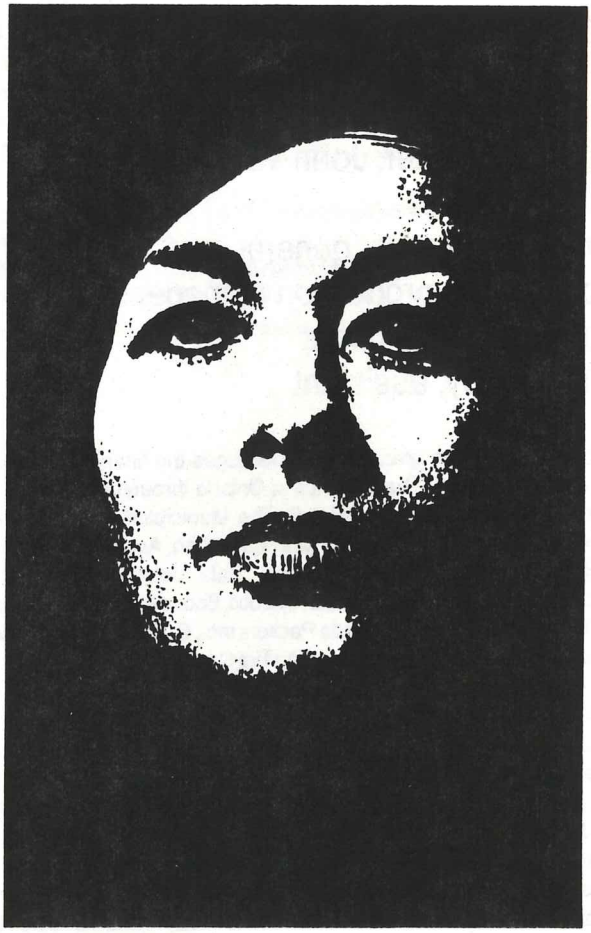
Biographies

Montréal's **Quatuor Morency** has long been noted for its devotion to the performance of contemporary music. They have commissioned and premiered numerous works, including Murray Shafer's *String Quartet No. 3* and quartets by Holliger and Miroglio. In their long association with the Société de musique contemporaine du Québec they have played the four-and-a half hour *String Quartet No. 2* by Morton Feldman and and evening devoted to the first three quartets of Murray Shafer.
Le Quatuor Morency was the Resident String Quartet at the Université de Montréal from 1979-1982, "Visiting String Quartet" at McGill University from 1988 to 1990 and is presently Resident String Quartet at the Centre d'Arts Morency.

ACWC/AFCC is a professional organization for women composers in Canada. It is active in the promotion of music written by Canadian women composers, and endeavours to help these composers achieve a higher profile in the community. It seeks to educate the public in Canada and abroad about the music written by women.

Norma Beecroft

a portrait



Sunday, November 27, 1994
8:00 pm Premiere Dance Theatre
Harbourfront Centre

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New Music Concerts

Premieres
Personalities
Portraits

94 95 season

1 *Sunday, October 23, 1994*
duMaurier Theatre Centre
Harbourfront Centre
Galina Ustvolskaya

2 *Sunday, November 27, 1994*
Premiere Dance Theatre
Harbourfront Centre
Norma Beecroft

3 *Sunday, February 5, 1995*
Art Gallery of Ontario
Walker Court
Erwin Schulhoff

4 *Sunday, March 19, 1995*
Premiere Dance Theatre
Harbourfront Centre
Tan Dun/Melissa Hui

5 *Sunday, April 9, 1995*
Premiere Dance Theatre
Harbourfront Centre
Udo Kasemets

6 *Sunday, April 30, 1995*
The Great Hall at Hart House
University of Toronto
Olivier Messiaen

7 *Sunday, April 30, 1995*
Premiere Dance Theatre
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